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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus news coverage from August 22-24 on the on-going relief efforts and plans for reconstruction in typhoon-stricken southern Taiwan; on the spread of H1N1 virus on the island; and on the plummeting approval ratings of the Ma Ying-jeou administration. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" said the United States was eager to provide humanitarian assistance to typhoon-devastated Taiwan partly because Washington felt that the Ma administration's immediate acceptance of Chinese assistance and tilting toward China would have a negative impact on its strategic interests in the Western Pacific. A news analysis in the KMT-leaning "China Times" said the natural disaster caused by Typhoon Morakot has triggered a political competition between the United States and China in Taiwan. An editorial in the KMT-leaning, China-focused "Want Daily" on the other hand, discussed U.S. President Barack Obama's planned visit to China in November. The article said the status quo across the Taiwan Strait meets the common interests of China and the United States and those of both sides of the Taiwan Strait. End summary.

A) "What Are the Intentions Harbored behind [the Ma Ying-jeou Administration's Initial Decision to] Turn down the U.S. Assistance?"

Joseph Wu, Policy Consultant for the Taiwan Thinktank and Research Fellow at National Chengchi University's Institute of International Relations, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (8/22):

"... The Taiwan people are filled with gratitude and admiration for the United States' coming to [conduct] rescue and relief operations [in Taiwan]. But, in addition to the United States' earlier private notice that it could provide us with assistance, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley also made a rare announcement on August 11 openly expressing the [United States'] hope to assist Taiwan and said that [Washington] had yet to receive any such request from Taiwan. It seems obvious that in addition to the serious damage [in the typhoon-stricken Taiwan] and the [Taiwan government's] slow and chaotic rescue operations, the United States had also seen the Taiwan government's immediate response about accepting China's assistance. [Taiwan's] move has confirmed the suspicion among U.S. policy [makers] about the Ma Administration's [position of] 'tilting toward China and distancing itself from the United States and Japan.' [It also proved that the concerns by [some] important figures in Washington's policy circles that 'China's influence on Taiwan has grown enormous' are no longer groundless fears. Likewise, the Ma administration's earnest acceptance of Beijing's assistance but declining that from Washington and Tokyo gave the United States a feeling that it would have a negative impact on its strategic interests in the Western Pacific, and that is why Washington acted so eagerly [in providing assistance to Taiwan.] There are signs of disaster in the Ma administration's foreign policy and now is the time for the administration to conduct an overall review and overhaul of its national strategy and foreign policy."

B) "A Flooding Has Triggered Political Competition between the United States and China in Taiwan"

Journalist Lin Ke-lun wrote in an analysis in the KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 120,000] (8/23):

"The damage brought about by Typhoon Morakot has not only caused heavy losses for the victims in the typhoon-stricken areas but also created many 'precedents' for the triangular relationship among the United States, China and Taiwan: The United States has 'for the first time' since it severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan sent the U.S. military to [conduct] rescue operations in Taiwan; 'for the first time' over the past six decades there have been 'quasi-rescue' [assistance] provided by mainland China coming to Taiwan. The island is suffering heavy losses in its typhoon-devastated zones, while behind it, 'political competition' between the United States and China is going on. ...

"August 17 was a critical day, when a U.S. marine transport aircraft carrying rescue supplies landed on the Tainan Airport in the name of 'humanitarian assistance' thirty years after Taiwan and the United States cut diplomatic ties. On August 17, the U.S. amphibious naval vessel, USS Denver, carrying four helicopters [arrived] in the coastal areas off Taiwan... [its] 'Sea Dragon' heavy lift helicopters started their one-week rescue mission in typhoon-stricken southern Taiwan until their mission ended Saturday. Also on August 17, China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait proposed [to Taiwan to send] ten of its technicians and pre-fabricated houses. ...

"The coincidence lies in the fact that the United States has again 'shown its flags' on Taiwan on 'August 17,' while the core of the Sino-U.S. 'August 17 Communiqué' was to oppose U.S. arms sales to

Taiwan. ... The flooding caused by a natural disaster has accidentally triggered a political competition between the United States and China in Taiwan, and both sides have 'landed on, and been received' by Taiwan. ..."

C) "How Taiwan Should Deal with [President] Obama's Visit to China"

The KMT-leaning, China-focused "Want Daily" [circulation: 10,000] editorialized (8/24):

"U.S. Ambassador to China Jon Huntsman announced that U.S. President Barack Obama will visit mainland China in November. This historical state visit has attracted the attention of the world and of Taiwan. Judging from the several previously-held major meetings and exchange of visits by officials from the two countries, the major subject of discussions for both sides is cooperation and not confrontation. ...

"Obama will be the first U.S. president who will visit mainland China within the first year of his term of office, and such a political move has highlighted China's increasingly important position in the United States foreign relations. Unlike the Cold War era, the international situation has moved from a bilateral to multi-lateral direction, and seeking intimate cooperation from China will inevitably become a major element for the future administration of the U.S. president. ... Given the global financial and environmental crises, China and the United States will share [more] common interests in their bilateral relations; for the Taiwan issue, which has for a long time been 'the most sensitive and core issue in Sino-U.S. relations,' now we are having better prospects. Washington has said several times that it is happy to see easing relations across the Taiwan Strait, and Beijing has also proactively promoted its relations with Taiwan. It is evident that while Beijing and Washington are moving toward closer cooperation because of their common interests, the status quo of cross-Strait relations not only meets the common interests of China and the United States but also those across the Taiwan Strait. ..."

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